



Foreign Agricultural Service

**GAIN Report**

Global Agriculture Information Network

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 10/1/1998

GAIN Report #FR8063

## **France**

### **Dairy Livestock and Poultry**

### **French Cattle Identification and Beef Labeling**

**1998**

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#### **Report Highlights:**

The EU 820/97 regulation on cattle identification is mandatory as of September 1, 1998. France is one of the most advanced EU member states in implementing the regulation, although the French domestic system, which has been developed since the 1950's, needs to be adapted to the European system. The EU 820/97 regulation also concerns beef labeling. France implemented a compulsory beef labeling scheme in October 1997 specifying the country of origin, type of breed and category of the animal. Although French consumers fully understand the indication of origin, they consider breed and category too complex.

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Includes PSD changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
Paris, FR

- 1. Identification System for Cattle: ..... 2
  - A. History of the French Beef Labeling Scheme: ..... 2
  - B. EU Cattle Identification: ..... 2
  
- 2. Beef Labeling Scheme : ..... 3
  - A. EU Regulation: ..... 3
  - B. French Regulation: ..... 3
  - C. French Control System: ..... 4
  - D. French Consumers’ Perception of Beef Labeling: ..... 4
  
- 3. Pending Sheep Labeling Scheme: ..... 5

# 1. Identification System for Cattle:

## A. History of the French Beef Labeling Scheme:

In the 1950's, the French Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG) launched the French identification system for cattle, which assigns a specific number (comparable to an identity) to animals, for genetic selection purposes.

In 1978, the MINAG put in place a national identification system for cattle for sanitary purposes. Its objective was to control infectious diseases such as brucellosis, tuberculosis, and foot and mouth disease. Veterinary Services of the MINAG and farmer groups working on disease control and called “sanitary defense groups” became involved in the new identification system.

In 1995, the MINAG launched France’ widespread identification system, called Generalized Permanent Identification (IPG), for policy purposes. It aimed to distribute EU cattle subsidies set by the reformed CAP of 1993 to French cattle producers (note: subsidies are fixed per head of cattle). The main differences between the old system and the new IPG are the following:

- ear tags used to be put on the animal by “identifying agents” of local governmental agencies called EDE, while under the new IPG, ear tags are put on newly-born animals directly by farmers;
- animals could have several identification numbers during their lives under the old system, for example when it lost an ear tag, but they keep the same identity number throughout their lives under the IPG;
- “identity cards” of animals, called Documents Accompanying Cattle (DAB), formerly differed by region, while under the IPG, the DAB format was made uniform throughout the country.

The French cattle identification system, as well as beef traceability in processing plants, was the basic means to trace beef from producers to retailers, as requested by French consumers during the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis of 1996/1997. The French identification system was indispensable in the development of beef labeling indicating the origin and quality of the product.

Note: animals wear two ear tags:

- one contains the animal national identification number which has 10 digits
- the other contains the animal’s herd number and working number (number inside the herd)

## B. EU Cattle Identification:

On March 1997, the EU Council of Agricultural Ministers adopted a new regulation (820/97) on identification and registration of bovine animals and labeling of beef and beef products. The regulation is implemented in France beginning September 1998 and aims to trace animals and their identity, their sanitary status, and their movements to other EU member states.

According to the 1997 EU regulation, farmers have to identify animals (mandatory under the IPG); all the various handlers involved (farmers, traders, slaughterhouses, renderers) have to inform the data base identification center of their detaining an animal; and a passport must be created with all the places of transit of animals ("passport" is the new name for DAB; in addition to the animal's mother's number its lists all handlers).

The EU 820/97 regulation is mandatory as of September 1, 1998. French producers are encountering difficulties in implementing the new EU beef identification scheme because many technical adjustments must be made to their data bases. According to the French institute for cattle breeding, France, the Netherlands, and Ireland are the most advanced in implementing the 820/97 regulation on identification. These three countries are the EU's leading cattle exporters.

## **2. Beef Labeling Scheme :**

### **A. EU Regulation:**

The 820/97 EU regulation imposed mandatory labeling of the origin (country of birth, fattening and slaughtering of animals) and the identification number that links a cut of beef with the farm where the animal was raised, starting on January 1, 2000. However, the EU regulation authorizes member states to implement such a system beginning January 1, 1998 for cattle born, raised and slaughtered within their borders.

### **B. French Regulation:**

France implemented a compulsory beef labeling scheme in October 1997, following an interprofessional agreement on the labeling scheme adopted on February 1997. The agreement was signed by all the organizations, federations and syndicates of French beef production and processing sectors, and the MinAg published an arrete (text of law) in the French Official Journal to make it compulsory. In February 1998, the same representatives of the French beef production and processing sector signed another agreement simplifying the labeling scheme. According to these agreements, the three criteria to be indicated on beef labels sold in France are the following:

	1997 agreement	1998 agreement
Origin of the animal	“France” when the animal was born, raised and slaughtered in France	- “France” when the animal was born, raised and slaughtered in France - voluntary labeling “European Union” or “Third countries” the animal was not born, raised and slaughtered in France
Category of the animal	Young bull, steer, bull, heifer, young cow, and cow	Young bull (for male animals less than 24 months old), steer, bull, heifer (for female animals under 42 month old), and cow.
Breed Type	Milk, beef, and mixed	Milk (including the 1997 milk and mixed types), and beef

The EU Commission rejected the wording “European Union” and “Third Countries” for non French beef labeling, and this is the reason why the simplified labeling scheme has not yet been published in the French Official Journal by the MinAg, waiting for the authorization of the EU Commission of the rest of the labeling scheme.

### **C. French Control System:**

Controls are performed by an independent, private company called “Société Générale de Surveillance” (General Surveillance Company-SGS) which works under 45011 standards, certifying the independence of third organizations. SGS controls beef labeling in distributors and suppliers.

Additional controls are performed by the General Directorate for Competition and Fraud (DGCCRF), which is a division of the French Ministry of Economy and Finance, and by the General Directorate for Food (DGAL), which is a division of the MinAg. DGCCRF and DGAL controls take place in slaughter houses, and among distributors, and importers.

### **D. French Consumers’ Perception of Beef Labeling:**

The National Institute for Training in the Food Industry (INSFA) conducted a survey of French consumer awareness and opinion on France’s beef labeling scheme. A total of 600 people were polled in February and March 1998, six months after the new French beef labeling scheme started.

The survey concludes that a large majority of consumers are not aware of the new beef labeling regulation: only 5 percent of people polled could spontaneously cite the three criteria. Consumers are the most informed about the country of origin requirement, which 47 percent mentioned. Only 11 percent cited type of breed and 8 percent cited category.

Although type of breed and category of animal are too complex for consumers, country of origin is clearly understood. This appears in the answers to the questions: “What breed and what animal category do you most frequently purchase?” Six percent of the people polled answered “dairy breed” and 2.5 percent answered “cow.” Actually, three quarters of the beef consumed in France comes from dairy cows! In addition, a significant percent was indifferent or did not know about animal breed (66 percent) or animal category (48 percent).

In contrast, a large majority is aware and pays attention to the origin of the meat. Eighty-seven percent of people polled said they purchase French beef, and 11 percent were indifferent or did not know about the origin. The other criteria of importance to French consumers when choosing a cut a beef are animal feed (73 percent), environmental protection (71 percent), and animal welfare (64 percent).

### 3. Pending Sheep Labeling Scheme:

An interprofessional agreement was signed on September 15, 1998, on a sheep labeling scheme, by all the representatives of sheep production and processing sectors. The sheep labeling proposal was presented to the EU Commission, which has not made any comment on it yet.

The proposals requires that the following criteria are mentioned on sheep labeling:

Origin of the animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- “France” for animals born, raised and slaughtered in France</li><li>- name of country X for animals born, raised and slaughtered in country X</li></ul>
Category of the animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- “Lamb (L)” for animal under 12 months</li><li>- “Sheep (S)” for animals over 12 months</li></ul>